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UNITED NATIONS
SPECIAL SAHELIAN OFFICE

SPECIAL MEETING

convened by the

Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel,
Bamako, Mali

15/16 March 1974

74-07566

1. Consolidated and summarized views of the United Nations system on the problems created by the drought

Several concerned and competent agencies, programmes and organizations of the United Nations system have, in recent months, completed comprehensive analyses of the tragic and destructive drought in several West African countries of the Sudano-Sahelian zone. There has developed from these studies a consensus on a number of fundamental aspects, not only among the United Nations agencies but also among donor and recipient countries as well.

- The drought, although it is a natural phenomenon, has, in its social and economic implications, been aggravated by man's unbalanced interference with the environmental situation on which the most vulnerable part of the economy, i.e. the primary producing sector - agriculture, depends. This interference has been of such a nature and of such magnitude that the natural environmental balance that existed in an extensive and largely subsistence oriented economy is in danger of being irreversibly modified or even destroyed.
- The nutritional level of the population of the zone that has been affected by drought has decreased drastically and has become severely unbalanced.
- The drought has principally affected that part of the population that was already subject to significant structural and seasonal unemployment and underemployment. The income level and the purchasing power of the population of these countries (four of which belong to the category of Least Developed Countries) have been further reduced. The drought has accelerated the rural exodus and has dramatically increased the rate of urbanization.
- Those national economies that rely heavily on foreign exchange earnings from the export of agricultural commodities have suffered a serious setback. Their foreign exchange earnings have not only decreased but their balances of payments have worsened due to the necessity of importing food commercially to augment the emergency food grants provided by many donor countries and organizations. The effect of the deterioration of their balances of payments will be seriously reflected in the budgets of these countries and will dramatically alter their future development capabilities. Diminished domestic financial resources will

be available for the urgent task of economic and social development that national development plans have contemplated.

- Even though the end of the current drought is not yet in sight, it can not be excluded that other droughts of similar magnitude and destructiveness will occur in the future. Such droughts will have even more serious consequences as they will affect substantially larger populations than now exist, and economies which will be more advanced and thus more likely to be vulnerable to the forces of natural catastrophe.

2. Development pattern, objectives for involvement and criteria for integrated development

A. Development pattern

The drought has demonstrated the far-reaching consequences of the disruption of the primary producing sector of an economy and the impact that the near collapse of this sector has had upon all other economic sectors and social aspects of the region. It is not realistic to expect that once the emergency situation is over and large external relief efforts no longer required, that recovery and rehabilitation measures will simply and easily lead to a state of economic health at least equivalent to that experienced during most favourable climatic periods. The impact of the drought has been so pervasive and so fundamentally damaging that an objective and comprehensive appraisal must be made of the requirements of the countries to overcome the backlog of needs, to bring themselves up to the point of self-sufficiency and finally to develop strong economies that will not require major, external support.

Even under the best of climatic conditions, the productive capabilities of the region are under great pressure to sustain an economy which is largely dependent on adequate and well-distributed rainfall. Most of the population, perhaps 90 per cent have been engaged in and dependant upon the production of food grains, livestock and cash crops (principally groundnuts and cotton).

Although much of this production has been required for subsistence, a substantial effort has been made in recent years in producing cash crops for export which are required to acquire foreign exchange for the importation of manufactured products.

The severe results of the disruption of the existing pattern within the primary production sector (agriculture) may raise fundamental questions within the governments of the affected countries concerning the desirability of modifying the pattern, and exploring new approaches that might lessen the disastrous consequences of drought in the future.

While there exists a concensus that the principal macro-economic variables of the area are manpower and physical resources, trade pattern and trade agreements, balance of payments, the debt and credit situation of each country, government finances and investment and saving patterns, it is generally recognized that the major constraints

are in the field of manpower and management, internal finance and foreign exchange positions, and physical resources.

The drought has negatively affected all three. Internal finances and foreign exchange positions as well as physical resources have deteriorated to such an extent that the consequences will be felt for years to come even if rainfall patterns revert to a normal situation soon.

As to the manpower resources, it must be assumed that worsened levels of nutrition in quantitative and qualitative terms will severely affect the productivity of the existing manpower.

The implications that negative modifications of the existing major constraints will have on the future development pattern are likely to be very important.

As to the role that outside assistance, both technical and financial, can play in improving the situation created by the drought, it must be recognized that the traditional system of aid through isolated, fragmented and unrelated activities will be of limited help to the countries in overcoming the present situation and that a satisfactory solution will only be found in an extensive, integrated and co-ordinated effort of donors.

B. Objectives for involvement of the international community

Among the objectives that may be useful in guiding the activities related to the recovery and rehabilitation of the drought-stricken countries and to intensification of the development of the resources of their economies, there are three that have special strategic importance. Each of these has a different time frame.

(a) One objective is to ensure that an emergency such as those of 1973 and 1974 can be met more effectively in the future. This will require the most careful advance planning of emergency operations to ensure that relief supplies will be available to the affected population when needed, in sufficient quantity at the lowest possible cost.

(b) The second objective is to eliminate, hopefully by 1980, the possibility of widespread suffering from future emergencies by developing production plans and programmes for those commodities that are indispensable for the sustenance of human life in the zone, i.e. cereals and meat.

(c) The third objective is to ensure that by 1990, the four LDCs, Mali, Chad, Upper Volta and Niger, have reached at least the average economic level of the rest of the African continent and that they and Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania have achieved a satisfactory growth rate with increased employment opportunities, income and income distribution. This will require not only an integrated national development approach by each country, but also a high degree of regional co-operation and joint inter-state planning.

C. Guidelines for an integrated development

(a) General consensus indicates that highest priority should be given to those programmes which will allow the countries of the zone to meet the rapidly growing demand for cereals and meat and to produce, wherever possible, a surplus for export.

Production targets that would make it possible for the zone to be less dependent on the imponderables of climate should be achieved through a harmonious and integrated approach that will maintain the delicate balance between man and environment.

(b) The increase of production ought to be achieved through concentrating on an increase in productivity of land, man and capital. While an orderly increase of productivity can directly and positively contribute to an improved balance of the natural environment and man, uncontrolled expansion of land use is likely to lead to its further deterioration.

(c) The numerous development schemes that are planned for the Sudano-Sahelian zone can be successfully implemented only with the active participation of large parts of the population.

A strategy for the development of the zone must take fully into account the existing social structures, attitudes and motivations both of the sedentary and nomadic populations in order to assure that the recovery and rehabilitation process has the full support of the population not only during the planning and investment period but also during the later periods of execution, operations and maintenance.

The urgency of the situation and limitation of both local and external resources calls for direct, immediate measures, with the highest possible cost-effectiveness ratios, in implementing projects. This will be necessary not only because of the tight budgetary situation of the seven countries but also because of the overall world economic situation. Faced with the choice between a labour- or capital-intensive approach, there may be, in many circumstances, considerable advantage in according priority to the labour-intensive approach.

While some foreign technical assistance may be required, maximum use must be made of indigenous skills, know-how and expertise available in the countries of the area.

(d) The success of the projects proposed for the recovery and rehabilitation of the Sudano-Sahelian zone will also depend to a large extent on solutions, by the governments themselves, to socio-economical problems. These relate in particular to the effective use of national resources, existing manpower, the increase of employment opportunities and income, and the rate of urbanization and sedendarization.

(e) Solutions to the technical, social and economic problems, and decisions as to major development options by the governments involved cannot be reached on the basis of any single formula. It is unlikely that in practice it will be feasible or effective to concentrate the development effort to narrow strips along the main rivers and around lake basins or to create a "green belt" to stop the Sahara. Rather it will be necessary to formulate solutions judiciously in the light of the socio-economic pattern of the countries and the region as a whole.

An effective approach may depend to a substantial degree on the sub-regional co-operation within river and lake basins, and the development of communications, transport and trade within the zone and with the coastal countries of West Africa.

(f) While it will be necessary to quantify the objectives of a rehabilitation cum development programme in terms of investments and annual recurrent costs, it is useful to note that many of the elements of effective development strategy are known, but have not been incorporated into a broad and integrated development plan. Maximum effort should be made to harmonize these known elements, that frequently have not passed the conceptual state, with the broad rehabilitation and development plans.

In view of the complexity and the urgency of this work, it may be practical to adopt a scheme of incremental planning taking priority needs into account before active consideration of long-term rehabilitation and development requirements. It would appear that an organized system of successive approximations might constitute a practical approach. The establishment of a programme of national and regional projects during the Ouagadougou Conference of September 1973 and the first amendments made in December 1973 by the Council of Ministers of the Permanent Interstate Committee is clearly consistent with such an approach.

It is unlikely that a substantial volume of aggregate planning in monetary terms will be required as this is likely to be done when the national development plans of the seven countries are reviewed and eventually modified in the light of the drought effects.

The conceptual task will consist mainly of integrated and coherent sectoral and project programming on a national and regional level, including programme and project formulation and progress control.

3. Concept and framework of an involvment of the United Nations system

A. Concept

The involvement of the United Nations system in a socio-economic recovery and rehabilitation programme of the Sudano-Sahelian region will be based on three criteria.

(a) The programme and projects must be requested by the Governments concerned.

(b) The actions that form integral parts of the involvement must be in harmony with a comprehensive, integrated strategy.

(c) The involvement must be within the special competence and capacity of the specialized agencies, programmes and organizations of the United Nations system.

B. Fields of involvement by the United Nations system

The operational activities of the Sahel programme should move in a continuous cycle: planning, implementation, control, performance evaluation, new planning. Each of these operational phases should be based upon, and be complemented and reinforced by the others, since none can exist effectively alone. In every phase, the United Nations family, subject to the availability of resources, stands ready to assist the PISC either in providing assistance if within the scope of its competence, or contributing, if requested, to the effective and efficient use of the assistance available from other sources.

(a) Planning. As the compendium shows, a number of projects listed are not yet ready for implementation: some lack more detailed feasibility studies, some need more detailed technical studies, some lack an analysis of the inputs required in terms of money, materials, equipment and human resources. Other projects require more precise identification and more complete structuring: for instance, hydrogeological and social studies, indispensable prerequisites for an efficient groundwater development programme have not as yet been prepared in some countries, although national "wells development programmes" have already been initiated in the same countries.

In addition, development plans have been severely disrupted by the drought. Countries may desire assistance in revising them in order to adjust to the new situation in terms of investment priorities and targets, integrating drought related projects into the national plans and taking also into account, where applicable, the goals of the Sahel Recovery Strategy. The United Nations family of agencies can provide assistance to fill those lacunae in programming and planning, either individually or collectively.

(b) Implementation. In the matter of implementation, many of the projects now in process or programmed could be executed by the United Nations family. For these projects as well as for others, undervritten by bilateral or multilateral agencies and about to begin, the greatest need of the Sahelian countries is in competent management personnel and institutional support. One possible way the United Nations might provide practical assistance to Governments would be in the development of national organizational systems responsible for project management and implementation, in the establishment of financial and operational procedures and in assisting with economic and financial analysis where needed. It should be noted that the intensification and consolidation of various management projects now under way in Africa under United Nations sponsorship may provide additional management capacity within the next two years.

(c) Evaluation. The quality of aid is as important as the quantity of aid. Thus a continuous and continued performance evaluation of the activities carried out in the Sahel under the sponsorship of PICS is an indispensable link in the cycle of Sahel operations. In the case of United Nations family projects, mid-project and terminal project evaluation is carried out by interdisciplinary teams. The direct objective of the evaluation would be an assessment of the assistance rendered in connexion with the Sahel drought: whether the assistance has accomplished its purpose, how well it has performed its planned functions, and an identification of the causes of success or failure. Taking into account the findings of the evaluation exercise, and the experience gained, the evaluation team would then suggest necessary adjustments in policy and operations aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of future assistance activities.

C. Role of United Nations agencies, programmes and organizations within a harmonious and integrated programme

(a) General Comment.

A coherent and integrated action programme of the United Nations system has been tentatively defined. It corresponds in its financial volume to 109 million US$ over a period of seven to ten year.

18.2 million US$ or 17 per cent of the total requirements have been committed by various agencies from available resources. 15 million US$ are specifically directed to projects of the compendium. UNDP and UNICEF are financing and executing jointly substantial parts of the well drilling programmes articulated in the Ouagadougou proposals for example.

The balance has been committed for projects that were specifically requested by individual governments or the PISC, including support for the Task Force on Livestock and provision of advisory service for the PISC.

Although the United Nations programme must be carefully compared with the projected programmes of other donors, it now appears that up to 91 million US$ will be required to implement the United Nations programme.

(b) Specific Sectors.

(i) Health problems of the region have been aggravated by the prolonged drought. The diet of the rural population, which is traditionally unbalanced during the "carry-over" periods between two normal harvests, has in the last three years been in a state of permanent imbalance which has grown steadily worse. Protein deficiency has become general as a result of a scarcity of meat and it is feared that certain clinical conditions, such as Kwashiorkor, for example, caused by multiple deficiencies but mainly due to chronic protein deficiencies may grow worse. The effect of protein deficiency on adults is severe, but it is even more damaging to children. Not only is the immediate danger to children very grave, but protein deficiency may seriously jeopardize not only their growth, but also the physical and intellectual development of the younger age-groups.

Almost every year a group of communicable diseases appears in the region which evolves in the form of epidemic outbreaks against a background of permanent endemicity. The weakened condition of large parts of the population has intensified the danger and presents public health authorities with new and serious problems.

The programme designed by WMO and UNICEF largely focusses on health measures for the entire population, town and village water supply and educational activities in the field of child welfare.

(ii) Shortage and irregularity of rain being at the root of problems of the Sudano-Sahelian zone, successful efforts in other sectors will depend upon information from the meteorological and hydrological services sectors. Without measurement and understanding of weather factors, attempts to develop production, by extension or intensification in normal as well as in dry years, and at the same time to preserve the fragile ecological system of environment, can only be on a trial and error basis. Such a basis can be costly, time consuming and possible disastrous. All investment projects dealing with water resources (be they in agriculture, industry, hydropower or water supply) cannot be rationally and economically planned and executed without meteorological and hydrological data resulting from time-series,

requiring continuous observation in a rationally designed network of meteorological and hydrological stations. The proposals formulated by WMO and related to the projects RAF 601 and RAF 602 aim at establishing an early warning system to allow emergency planning, collection and evaluation of meteorological data on which other sectors have to base their work.

(iii) Projects related to agriculture in general and to crop and livestock production, water management, reforestation and fisheries in particular, constitute by far the largest part of the projects which were advanced by Heads of State in Ouagadougou in September and are contained in the project compendium. The rehabilitation of the cropping sector and the reconstitution of national herds within a harmonious and integrated development concept are indeed the most urgent tasks.

During the first part of 1973 the first project of the United Nations system in the context of a short and medium term recovery programme was started by FAO with UNDP financing. This project, "Task force on immediate measures to be taken regarding livestock populations in the Sudano-Sahelian drought zone" was designed to determine and facilitate the implementation of all measures necessary to save as much as possible of the endangered cattle and preserve nuclei reproductive stocks of the best animals in the most affected zones. FAO has provided substantial support for the PISC since its establishment.

FAO's capacity, competence and experience of the area should allow this agency to become involved in the formulation as well as execution of a number of these projects.

(iv) As early as May 1973 the Freedom from Hunger Campaign/Action for Development launched a programme aimed at promoting Non-Government Organizations' involvement in medium- and long-term development in the Sahelian region. This effort endeavoured to use NGO resources in a manner consistent with the overall involvement of the United Nations system. The direction and strategy of NGO involvement in the medium- and long-term as it is emerging from the dialogue among partners in industrialized countries and in the Sahel includes the promotion of rural organizations, integrated development action at the village and farm level with particular attention to the nomadic population and the low income groups in the rural sector. FFHC/AD's particular efforts concentrate on broadening public understanding of and support for assistance in the Sahelian region through carefully planned educational work in the industrialized countries. As an indication of the order of magnitude of NGO support, the voluntary agencies represented in a recent NGO mission have raised or intend to raise funds for the Sahelian region amounting to about $ 15 million over a 5-year period.

(v) During 1973, WFP provided emergency assistance (grain) to seven Sahel countries valued at close to $ 10 million (including ocean freight and contributions to internal transportation costs). During 1974 assistance to the same countries will be of a similar order but almost exclusively under food-for-work projects. Until the end of February 1974 seven projects have been approved at the total WFP cost of $ 7,385,990. These projects involve about 18 million man-days; food rations include sorghum, dried fish and edible oil.

As for the coming years, WFP's intention is to assist with food to the maximum extent possible labour intensive projects where either part of wages will be paid in kind or (in the case of communal and other voluntary labour) the total compensation may consist of food. The size of WFP food supplies to such rehabilitation/development activities in Sahel countries will depend on WFP's general supply position but every effort will be made to ensure that in coming years allocations will not be below the quantities approved for the same purposes in 1974.

In coming years also, labour intensive self-help works (to be financially assisted by various donor countries and organizations) will include the following categories that are articulated in the project compendium:

(i) Construction of wells, their repair and maintenance, (ii) water management, including dikes and small dams, (iii) irrigation and land reclamation, (iv) reforestation and soil conservation, (v) repair and construction of roads and tracks, (vi) community development, including construction of communal buildings and grain stores.

(vi) UNDP has since last year played an important role within the United Nations system to review the drought situation and to commit part of its available resources to a drought programme. 8.5 million US$ have been committed and partially expended for projects implemented by FAO, UN/OTC, UNICEF and WMO.

(vii) The effects of the drought have affected parts of the population that are subject to structural and seasonal unemployment and underemployment. This leads to a further deterioration of the economic level of that population and in many cases to the destruction of means of livelihood. The level of income as well as the already low purchasing power of the population further decreased.

A major concern in the context of an economic rehabilitation must be the reestablishment of a pre-drought employment and income level. Measures are needed to allow the population to be better adjusted to the consequences of future droughts by

intensified vocational training, diversification of activities, improved institutional support as, for example, through co-operatives, and strengthened local government to mobilise local initiative and talent.

(viii) The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has been providing advisory services in the field of regional planning and transport through its United Nations Development Advisory Team (UNDAT) in the past and intends to make these entire services available to a drought recovery programme.

(ix) The future development of the area affected by drought will be significantly influenced by the way regional water management plans embracing the river basins of the Senegal, Gambia, Niger, Blackwater and Lake Chad are designed. Due to the regional nature of these basins, regional concepts ought to be harmonized with national considerations. Equally important is to link national and regional transport aspects.

The Office of Technical Co-operation of the United Nations (OTC) has been dealing with ground and surface water studies as well as with the transport sector in the past and will be ready to continue further assistance.

(x) While no specific projects within the competence of ILO, UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNESCO and other United Nations agencies have been included in the Ouagadougou proposals these agencies, programmes and organizations will continue and intensify their activities in the seven countries of the region.